

HI(GH) LIFE  
LOW TIDE

A THESIS SUBMITTED TO THE GRADUATE DIVISION OF THE  
UNIVERSITY OF HAWAI'I AT MĀNOA IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT  
OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF

MASTERS OF ARTS

IN

ENGLISH

MAY 2017

By

Hannah Kanoelani Tsuneko Spencer

Thesis Committee:

Gary Pak, Chairperson  
Craig Santos Perez  
ku'ualoha ho'omanawanui

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

1. Introduction.....	1
2. <i>HI(gh) Life Low Tide</i> .....	23
i. The Blood.....	24
ii. The Romantic.....	34
iii. The Unavoidable.....	49
iv. The Fatal .....	63
v. The Sacred .....	73
3. Bibliography .....	80

## **Introduction**

This creative thesis explores duality in the lives of Kanaka Maoli, or Native Hawaiians, and the tensions we face in our identities—between who we want to be and what our realities are. Post-colonial life creates tension for contemporary Native Hawaiians. We are caught between what we believe a Kanaka Maoli “should” be and the realities of survival, the conveniences of modern-day life, and the colonial legacy we have inherited. Some see the “real natives” as the ones living off the land, farming, fishing, perpetuating traditional practices, speaking fluent Hawaiian, and sprinkling ‘ōlelo no‘eau into conversation. But what about those of us who grow up speaking English only, eat McDonald’s and processed food bought at a supermarket with food stamps, work in hotels, live in condominiums in town, go to church, and binge on Netflix each weekend? They are not less Hawaiian—there is incredible multiplicity of Kanaka Maoli identity. Still, due to generations of colonial violence disrupting our cultural and spiritual identities, many struggle connecting to “authentic” Hawaiian being. But what is authentic?

This collection of poems focuses on the themes of colonization/decolonization/re-kalo-nization and how they play out in our everyday lives. Key issues my poems touch on include drug abuse, suicide, lost traditions, broken families, and health disparities. Consisting of free verse poetry, concrete poetry, and experiments in writing in voice, my writing is inextricably rooted in place, in Hawai‘i. I weave together different styles and perspectives to create an overall impression of theme and to capture the multiplicity of experience, while also stringing in various motifs and non-linear narratives for a sense of continuity. Another focus of my writing is relationships and love. I hope that my writing enters into generative spaces that imagine more productive realities for Hawai‘i. Like Kanaka Maoli artist Solomon Enos asks, I too want to ask,

“Is there a better story than this story? Is there a better reality than this one?” Despite the incredible and often tragic hardships people of these islands face, better realities are possible—they begin in the imagination and are given life through our words.

## **Positionality**

After seven years of being home in Hawai‘i, I am finally coming into my identity as a Kanaka Maoli wahine. To borrow the words of the esteemed Samoan author and scholar, Albert Wendt, I now belong to Hawai‘i, “and it nourishes my spirit, helps to define me, and feeds my imagination” (71). I am Hawaiian from my paternal grandfather, Melvin Everett Spencer, Jr., who was also Chinese and English. My father’s mother is a Japanese national. My own mother, born in Huntsville, Texas, is an amalgamation of European ethnicities including English, French, and Swiss, but her family identifies as being very Texan. I lived in Michigan until I graduated from high school where I studied American Literature and Shakespeare, rowed in crew, and went to church on my own each Sunday. Then, I came out to the islands for college at UHM. I did not grow up speaking ‘ōlelo Hawai‘i or doing many cultural practices, but I was raised knowing the value of ‘ohana, aloha, and hō‘ihi. I operate in multiple perspectives; my foundation is Western, but gradually, native and global perspectives are becoming more natural. As an example, I can now easily identify when people try to form dichotomies between cultural knowledge and science, and I feel confident to call them out on such. On first arriving, I was definitely an “outsider” to local and Hawaiian culture. However, after years of studying Hawaiian culture, literature, and language; forging relationships with people from across the archipelago and even Oceania; teaching at an institute for Native Hawaiian children; and devoting myself to a relationship with a Nānākuli native, I finally feel like an “insider.” I can

never forget the journey though, and my “insidership” is not complete, nor do I want it to be. It is in this process that my identity is actualized. My positionality allows me to makawalu the Hawaiian lived experience objectively as well as subjectively, as insider and outsider, as Christian and Hawaiian, as academic and practical. This is from where my writing comes. In her essay “Mana Wahine, Education and Nation-building: Lessons from the Epic of Pele and Hi‘iaka for Kanaka Maoli Today,” Kanaka Maoli literary scholar ku‘ualoha ho‘omanawanui writes about the value of makawalu: “Our diversity of voice is not discord, but passion—the same passion for the lāhui our ali‘i (chiefs) shared” (207). In the editor’s note to *‘Ōiwi* vol. 1, she even calls this diversity our “rainbow of mana‘o” that we have kuleana to showcase. Despite the traces of my “outsidership,” I hope my voice and passion for ka lāhui Hawai‘i will be heard, be of value, and brighten our rainbow.

### **Mo‘okū‘auhau**

I fell in love with literature and poetry my junior year of high school in American Literature with Mr. Brett Trocchio. The class we did a close reading of William Carlos Williams’s “The Red Wheelbarrow” remains one of the most memorable of my high school career. This love deepened during my undergraduate studies. I was inspired by the following authors from the Western literary canon and beyond: Toni Morrison, William Faulkner, Ernest Hemingway, e.e. cummings, T. S. Eliot, Paulo Coelho, Walt Whitman, Langston Hughes, Claudia Rankin, nayyirah waheed (*salt.*), Sherman Alexie, Maxine Hong Kingston, Monique Troung (*Book of Salt*), and Sarith Peou (*Corpse Watching*). Around the same time, it was my mentor Lois-Ann Yamanaka and, ironically, Professor Candace Fujikane who both (independently) introduced me to local literature. I read Yamanaka’s work, along with other

local writers such as Lee Cataluna, Lee Tonouchi, Gizelle Gajelonia, and R. Zamora Linmark. It was life changing to experience how raw, experimental, and relatable stories and poetry could be. This is when I began writing in voice. I also read Hawaiian poet Haunani-Kay Trask first with Professor Fujikane.

The next step in my evolution as a scholar and writer was taking Hawaiian Literature with Professor ku‘ualoha ho‘omanawanui. Along with traditional texts, we studied contemporary Kanaka Maoli authors including Brandy Nālani McDougall, Kristiana Kahakauwila, and those featured in *‘Ōiwi: A Native Hawaiian Journal*. Through analysis of the mo‘okū‘auhau and piko of Hawaiian literature, I started to see myself in a long tradition of Kanaka Maoli writers.

My first year of teaching at Kamehameha Schools brought me to another mentor, Richard Hamasaki. In his generosity, he uncovered the world of concrete poetry to me. He insisted that I read the works of Wayne Westlake, Joe Balaz, and Imaikalani Kalahale and that I create some visual poems myself. Richard’s 10<sup>th</sup> grade students were required to produce a variety of concrete poetry. They were honors students, but I figured if they could do it, so could I.

Finally, after grounding myself as a scholar of Kanaka Maoli literature, I had the chance to take Pacific Literature with Pohnpeian poet Emelihter Kihleng. With her, I studied the works of Albert Wendt, Epeli Hau‘ofa, Sia Figiel, Teresia Teaiwa, Craig Santos Perez, Kathy Jetnil-Kijiner, Grace Molisa, Jamaica Osorio, and Brandy Nālani McDougall. This course helped me understand Hawai‘i’s role in the larger Oceanic community and provided amazing opportunities to interact with Pacific writers. For instance, I was able to read some of my poetry to and hear feedback from Sia Figiel herself.

In addition, I have also been heavily influenced by the critical work that I have read throughout my graduate studies. The following minds stand out as having been particularly useful in my own thinking and work: Ngūgĩ wa Thiong’o, Karl Marx, Edward Said, Gayatri Spivak, Patrick Wolfe, Haunani-Kay Trask, ku‘ualoha ho‘omanawanui, Brandy Nālani McDougall, D. Māhealani Dudoit, Candace Fujikane, Kehaulani Kauanui, Noenoe Silva, Ty Kāwika Tengan, Jonathan Osorio, Albert Wendt, Terence Wesley-Smith, and Konai Helu Thaman. These scholars articulate ideas about power structures in society, colonialism, and indigenous people that have shaped the way I see and write about the world. My hope is for their mana‘o and intellectual mana to perpetuate through my creative writing.

## **Kuleana**

Genealogy and kuleana, these were the two key words that Māhealani Dudoit, founding editor of *‘Ōiwi: A Native Hawaiian Journal*, writes that she had in mind when she first dreamt of the *‘Ōiwi* project. I have shared my intellectual and literary mo‘okū‘auhau, and now it is appropriate to discuss my kuleana. Dudoit even chose the name “Kuleana ‘Ōiwi Press” for the powerful connotations of the word. All writers have kuleana. And Kanaka Maoli writers have kuleana “today within the mo‘okū‘auhau of our people” (1). One translation of the Hawaiian word kuleana is one’s right or privilege, and another translation is one’s responsibility. In her essay “Carving a Hawaiian Aesthetic,” Dudoit explains how the lack of a Hawaiian equivalent word for “art” shows that “while aesthetic quality was most decidedly important to ancient Hawaiian sensibilities, it always functioned in conjunction with a practical, spiritual, or symbolic capacity, whether secular or sacred” (23). And Mao Tse-Tung, Chinese communist revolutionary and poet, asserts, “There is in fact no such thing as art for art’s sake... or art that is

detached from or independent of politics” (25). The art of writing is a spiritual and political act, and I have come to understand that Kanaka Maoli creative writers have a special kuleana, or social function, within our society. As an emerging writer myself, I have discovered a deeper understanding of what that role entails. In my research and writing, I first recognize that the kuleana of a Kanaka Maoli writer is inevitably tied up with Hawai‘i’s history of colonialism, which includes the 1893 military overthrow of the sovereign kingdom of Hawai‘i, the 1896 ban on the native language from public schools, the 1898 illegal U.S. annexation, and the subsequent and on-going occupation. In the context of the current period of settler colonialism in the islands, Kanaka Maoli writers, like me, serve to create spaces for our people to remember, resist, and reimagine.

My first kuleana as a Kanaka Maoli writer is to remember the past and help our people understand and honor our history, ancestry, and cultural legacy. We cannot be left with only the Western historians’ perspective. In *The Wretched of the Earth*, Frantz Fanon warns how colonialism “turns to the past of the oppressed people, and distorts, disfigures, and destroys it” (210). He goes on to explain the phases in the evolution of the native intellectual’s writing: first there is the “assimilation” phase of European “inspiration” and trends; second, the “disturbed” phase where the native “decides to remember what he is” and where “[w]e spew ourselves up;” and third, the “fighting” phase of revolutionary and national literature (222). In a way, I feel my collection embodies all three phases at once. I write in English, grounded mainly in Western aesthetics with some attempts at indigenization. Some of my writing is indeed disturbing, but I also hope that it resists colonial logic and assumptions. While remembering the violent, devastating parts of our history *is* “disturbing,” I do not think that the remembering phase need always be likened to “spewing up” or vomiting, since even in the bad, there is great beauty in our



history and the ways those before us handled turbulent situations. Queen Liliu‘okalani, a writer herself, is a prime example of such grace; my favorite quote from her demonstrates this: “...He will keep His promise, and will listen to the voices of His Hawaiian children lamenting for their homes. It is for them that I would give the last drop of my blood; it is for them that I would spend, nay, am spending, everything belonging to me.” Words such as these embolden me as I do the necessary work of “remembering what we are” and looking at the colonial legacy of Hawai‘i in the ugly face. In his seminal essay, “Towards a New Oceania,” Wendt writes, “Any real understanding of ourselves and our existing cultures calls for an attempt to understand colonialism and what it did and is still doing to us. This understanding would better equip us to control or exorcise it...” (74). This understanding can be disturbing, but, like Wendt insinuates, the process can be edifying too, which makes it an integral part of decolonizing our minds and fulfilling my role as a writer. Part of my personal “remembering” involves the study of Hawaiian literature, including Kumulipo, the epic of Hi‘iakaikapoliopole, *Kamapua‘a*, the Hawaiian romance *Lā‘ieikawai*, and more. In her book, *Finding Meaning: Kaona and Contemporary Hawaiian Literature*, Kanaka Maoli literary scholar and poet Brandy Nālani McDougall describes a framework for approaching mo‘olelo. Her concept of “ola (i) nā mo‘olelo” expresses “how we live mo‘olelo and how mo‘olelo live through us” and recognizes that Kanaka Maoli writers and scholars have the “kuleana (responsibility) to preserve, honor, and celebrate our stories, as well as to retell them and create more stories so that they may continue to live” (3-4). In some of my poems such as “Mānoa Falls Hike” and “His Fish and Poi Were Enough,” I consciously bring the “past” into the present with references to living mo‘olelo. Although simple allusions, these “acts of relearning, remembering, and renarrating indigenous mo‘olelo” attempt decolonial work “to address the intergenerational rupture” of indigenous

knowledge “forced through colonialism” (Ty Kāwika Tengan as quoted by McDougall 5). Of course, this “rupture” makes remembering difficult. In my case, there is often a language barrier that limits my access to the rich past, but I make every effort I can with my intermediate-beginner’s level in ‘ōlelo Hawai‘i. Though limited, perhaps my use of ‘ōlelo will encourage readers to explore the language and also remember.

Since writers put into words what others cannot, my second social function as a Kanaka Maoli writer is to help people understand the current situation of our lāhui and to take part in the resistance against the negative aspects of a colonial legacy. In his essay, “For Whom Does One Write?” Jean-Paul Sartre describes the process that takes place when an African-American writer writes to an African-American audience:

In trying to become clear about his own personal situation, he clarifies theirs for them. He mediates, names, and shows them the life they lead from day to day in its immediacy, the life they suffer without finding words to formulate their sufferings. He is their conscience, and the movement by which he raises himself from the immediate to the reflective recapturing of his condition is that of his whole race. (79)

In the same way, as I find words to express my life and the situations I see around me, I aspire to help “clarify” the situation of other Kanaka Maoli. This revealing of ourselves to ourselves is critical before we can work to solve the issues that we face, for without an articulation of our current sufferings, we will suffer in silence and often in anger. I want to be a voice articulating the Kanaka Maoli experience especially for the voiceless in our communities. I think this is one of the strengths of my collection. Ho‘omanawanui writes:

We acknowledge our existence, our identity as a people, our relationship to our ‘āina, to our past, our present and future through our stories. They are our history, our truth. We

must continue to recover, retell, and *write* our own stories which reflect our own identity and existence, regardless of the ‘āina, the mo‘okū‘auhau, or the hālau of ‘ike we come from. Because, like our ancestors, we are all kūpa‘a ma hope o ka ‘āina—patriots, valuable members of a vibrant, global community. (210)

So my voice is not alone; I am part of a long tradition of resistance. From abundant nineteenth century Hawaiian-language newspapers to anti-annexation petitions to contemporary Native Hawaiian journals like *‘Ōiwi*, Kanaka Maoli have been writing “to reveal” and to resist colonial forces that seek to devalue and erase our experiences. My poems are a revolt against silencing of a contemporary Kanaka Maoli experience, an act of aloha ‘āina. And we also resist through cultural insistence. In his book, *Writing in a State of Siege*, André Brink likens art to life-sustaining food when he writes:

The work of art cannot—and need not—be justified on religious, political, moral or other grounds. But it satisfies a need in man which is as vital as hunger, even though it may not be recognized as readily. Like hunger, it is a personal need. But in its intimacy it is extremely significant. For it can expand an awareness of the human condition. (46)

Above all, a nation needs to be able to feed itself, sustain itself, before it can move up further on a proverbial “hierarchy of needs” pyramid. For Kanaka Maoli, this, of course, includes a literal feeding of the lāhui by returning back the land, cultivating taro, and caring for fishponds, all of which are acts of cultural insistence. But as Brink suggests, the lāhui also needs to be fed by its writers. We need writers who can expand the nation’s consciousness of its own condition as Sartre describes, while satisfying its deeper personal needs, because only when a people are fed will they be able to fight. Pioneering Kanaka Maoli writer S.N. Hale‘ole states in his foreword to *Lā‘ieikawai*, the first book published in Hawaiian by a Hawaiian for Hawaiians, that he hoped

his book would be the first of many of a national literature and that his words would “nourish [the readers’] many thoughts with knowledge and wisdom,” despite the quickly changing cultural landscape of Hawai‘i (vii). Hale‘ole saw the power of literature to nourish his nation while also “prevent[ing] the loss of its fascinating traditions.” By writing in way that insists on cultural perpetuation and by refusing to let the parts of us that crave for beauty and cultural expression die, we resist the forces who would want otherwise. And this idea of art, or in the case of creative writers, of a written piece, as sustenance and resistance also relates to Gerald Vizenor’s notion of “survivance.” Vizenor describes native survivance in his essay “Aesthetics of Survivance” as “active sense of presence over absence, deracination, and oblivion; survivance is the continuance of stories, not a mere reaction, however pertinent. Survivance is greater than the right of a survivable name” (4). As I write, I assert the presence of Hawaiian people and I work towards something beyond merely surviving. I hope my poems will nourish the minds of my readers, and that they will be more than just consumers but also be empowered to use their own voices. Ho‘omanawanui quotes Teresia Teaiwa, Pacific Studies scholar, to tell us that “[w]hen [the Māori] do the haka, the most fearsome warriors do the *pukana* (tongue stick). You want to use your tongue? Your tongue is a weapon” (210). Ho‘omanawanui continues, “What she means is our tongues represent storytelling... Our tongues represent speaking up against oppression, a first step in advocating for social justice” (210). Through our stories, voices, and poetry, we will resist oppressive colonial forces and imagine visions of the future where survivance is possible.

Thus, the third social function and kuleana of Kanaka Maoli writers is to look to the future and reimagine what it means to be a Kanaka Maoli in order for our people to move forward in prosperity. Whenever I think of this topic of reimagining futures, I think of Solomon

Enos's work. One time when I invited him to speak to my classes, he shared the mana'o behind his mural of Mākua Valley at Disney's Aulani Hotel and Resort. He said people usually see the image of the valley full of kanaka presenting ho'okupu at an ahu and assume it is a painting of the past. Enos went on to explain that if you look closely, the painted valley is actually wounded and carries the scars and remains of its military occupation—this is a depiction of the future, not the past. In a beautiful and subtle way, Enos's mural is a subversive act of imaginative land recovery. Edward Said explains in *Culture and Imperialism* how anti-imperialist resistance literature, which is a category applicable to Hawaiian literature, develops from the natives' desire to distance themselves from the imperialist "master." To create distance, there is a dire need for land recovery. Said continues:

If there is anything that radically distinguishes the imagination of anti-imperialism, it is the primacy of the geographical element. Imperialism after all is an act of geographical violence, through which virtually every space in the world is explored, charted, and finally brought under control. For the native, the history of colonial servitude is inaugurated by loss of the locality to the outsider; its geographical identity must thereafter be searched for and somehow restored. Because of the presence of the colonizing outsider, the land is recoverable at first only through the imagination. (225)

Land recovery is a necessary tactic of anti-imperialism. Because of our genealogical connection with our 'āina, or land, the islands are more than just where we live—they are who we are. Several of my poems, such as "Grown in the Wai'anae Sun," "Direction," "Autobiography of an Island Boy," demonstrate this close relationship to land. Our connection with and love for the 'āina is an important part of our cultural consciousness, so the loss of land not only allowed for a physical occupation of colonial forces but also for a mental occupation. Since this loss was

crucial to our colonization, it makes sense that our decolonization would center on recovering the land. Our geographical identity was taken from us, but it can be restored through the imagination of our writers. We as writers are capable of imagining times and spaces of the future where the land is *ours* again. As our art reaches others, people beyond us will be able to envision those futures as well. As the collective vision grows, we can move closer to making that imagined future into a real future. Creative writers can also “safely” imagine pathways to a land recovery, and then the people can judge those pathways and choose which ones may be suitable for and successful in real-life implementation. Examples of these imagined pathways include the violent scene portrayed in “A Push Over the Pali” of tourists being pushed over the Pali Lookout and the notion of self-sacrifice of all humanity for the sake of the land in “Sacrifice.” Another example is the suggestion for Hawaiians to just buy back their own land in “Hawaii, the Homeland.” As a people, we can acknowledge possible ways to deal with the colonizing outsider presence and make informed decisions on our actual forward movement. Margaret Atwood also speaks about the imagination in her essay, “Disneyland of the Soul.” She declares that writers have “a human imagination, in the many forms it may take; the power to communicate; and hope” (132). Truly, it seems that one of the most powerful tools that writers have is our imagination. So, another kuleana of Kanaka Maoli writers is to use our imaginations to spur hope in the hearts of our fellow native people. If we can imagine control of ‘āina and the possibilities, we are one step closer to a decolonized future. My poem “Mo‘o ‘Āina” envisions the land as a mo‘o with the ability to “shed its cement skin.” While one day this may be literally true when our honua decides it can take no more and finds ways to restore herself, it can also be read as a metaphor for what can happen when we, the people, return to our piko, the ‘āina, and

*together* experience restoration. If readers do not like my imaginings, I hope they dream up their own hopeful alternatives.

The reshaping of our native identities is another aspect of building hope. Creative writers can bring forth new representations of Kanaka Maoli that break from the “imagined” Hawaiian and that allow more kanaka to recognize themselves as Hawaiians. Thomas King, a Cherokee novelist, explores this type of imagining in his book *The Truth about Stories*. He writes about how everyone knows who “Indians” are and everyone knows what they look like, the stereotype of an Indian exists in our imaginations (54). Now for Native Americans to be “imagined” as “real,” they have to be seen as “authentic,” meaning they fulfill the stereotyped performative elements of their ethnicity, such as dressing a certain way. This relates to Hawaiian writers because dominant colonial forces have appropriated our culture to create an “imagined” and “authentic” Hawaiian. See any tourism advertisement or select Disney movies for illustrations. But it is not just the tourism industry or Hollywood; perhaps in the less damaging local view, maybe this imagined Hawaiian is not thin and exotic, but she does have long, wavy hair, brown skin, and a Manuheali‘i dress and gold bracelets on. This type of imagining is dangerous because these are only external identity markers. King argues that the “imagined Indian” is damaging because elements of this colonially constructed identity become part of a test that one must pass in order to be considered “Indian” even among Native Americans themselves. These same identity politics are at play in the Kanaka Maoli community. For example, personally, being light skinned and only a beginner at ‘ōlelo Hawai‘i, I feel less Hawaiian whenever I interview for Hawaiian-based scholarships or opportunities. I feel like I cannot pass their tests. The performative side of ethnicity is dangerous because it can make those who do not “perform” feel excluded from that portion of their ethnic identity, which achieves colonial

objectives of “disappearing” natives and a logic of elimination. The Hawaiians in my poetry, and the Hawaiians I know, do not fit into any sort of mold—they work in the lo‘i, at universities, Jack in a Box, or not at all. In part, they inspire my project to deepen the image of Hawaiian identity. Of course, indigenous people are already resisting these imaginings. Matika Wilbur, for instance, a Swinomish and Tulalip Native American photographer takes and compiles photographs of fellow contemporary Native Americans across the country. The goal of this national documentary project, Project 562, is to “represent Native people from every tribe. By exposing the astonishing variety of the Indian presence and reality at this juncture, we will build cultural bridges, abandon stereotypes, and renew and inspire our national legacy.” In the same way, to combat the stereotypes and the “test,” Kanaka Maoli writers must take up the kuleana of “exposing” all the different ways that Hawaiians can *be* and of reimagining what we can look and be like, which also asserts our active presence and existence. I see my creative thesis at work to “de-Disneyfy” the hegemonic settler colonial narrative of Hawaiian identity as seen in movies such as *Lilo and Stitch* and *Moana*. Ho‘omanawanui’s paper “Mo‘olelo as Social and Political Action: Responding to Jack Zipes (De-Disneyfying Disney) and Waziyatawin (From the Clay We Rise)” elaborates on this concept:

Far from harmless, these kinds of [settler colonial] narratives justify conquest and settlement over lands and indigenous peoples. In this context, indigenous stories [alternative narratives, indigenous truth telling] can function as social and political action and “serve as a subversive reminder that the ‘truth’ pedaled by settler society,” for example, “is not our truth.” (1)

As we see representations of Kanaka Maoli behaving and appearing in more than just the stereotypical ways the tourism industry and Disney would like us to, we can begin to see our



lived experiences as Kanaka Maoli as legitimate, true, and “authentic” as well. As Wendt writes, “usage determines authenticity,” and my poems reflect Hawaiian culture as I see it (76).

Although my collection focus on many stereotypical issues that Hawaiians face (drug use, incarceration, suicide), the details show that every struggle is unique and we are not solely defined by our struggles, and my poems also combat the simple, idyllic, Disneyfied visions of the islands. We cannot allow for Disney to remain the top “arbiter of Hawaiian culture for audiences around the globe” (ho‘omanawanui 4). I hope that my writing offers new perspectives and humanizes the kanaka dealing with these issues. Perhaps they will recognize parts of themselves and their families in my poetry and feel legitimized—because we are mothers, lovers, brothers, students, military wives, and granddaughters and we love, hate, and fear in so many breathtaking, different ways.

While reflecting on kuleana, I think of the words of Kanaka Maoli educator Summer Puanani Maunakea in her article “Arriving at an ‘Āina Aloha Research Framework: What Is Our Kuleana as the Next Generation of ‘Ōiwi Scholars?” She explains, “The issue of kuleana is critical, particularly understanding that it is given, kuleana must continue to be earned, it is not claimed, and that it comes to be recognized by everyone involved” (150). Through my courses at UHM with encouragement from my kumu and classmates, through my role as kumu at Kamehameha Schools, and through my personal involvement in the Kanaka Maoli community, my sense of kuleana has been affirmed.

## **Form and Content**

My creative thesis is a reflection of me; it embodies my personality, passions, and quirks. I write what I hear and see, and I write to confess. First, I am reflected in this collection’s form

and genre. I am indecisive and afraid of missing out, which leads me to seek ways to have “the best of both worlds.” Thus, my thesis features multi-genre fiction writing, including poetry, short pieces of prose, and concrete poetry. R. Zamora Linmark, an author who has pushed the boundaries of genre, fascinates me with his innovative and delirious storytelling. For example, his postmodernist novel *Rolling the R's* takes the readers through a whirlwind of poetic prose in first person and third person narratives, poems, scripts, middle school book reports and vocabulary tests, report cards, letters, essays, and prayers. In pastiche style, Linmark combines vibrant vignettes of the chaotic lives and sexualities of children living in Kalihi in a non-linear, fragmented way that somehow all works together to tell an overall narrative. His experimental text, which gives voices to multiple perspectives in a way that the form matches the content, demands attentions and thought. Informed by Linmark's novel, my project includes various genres and perspectives woven together in a non-linear fashion as well. Certain characters such as Auntie T, brother Benjamin, and a west side lover appear throughout my collection for instance. And my use of repetition, line spacing, and motifs of blood and red help provide a sense of coherence to the pieces as well.

Furthermore, my project is a blend of fiction and non-fiction. I learned in my Creative Nonfiction workshop with Esther Figueroa, the line between fiction and creative nonfiction is not as distinct as it is assumed to be; truth and realness are hard to objectively define. Like in Lois-Ann Yamanaka's *Saturday Night at the Pahala Theater*, while her author's note states: “This is a work of fiction,” she has admitted that the poetic novella is semi-autobiographical. Bringing that same touch of reality, often with specific, idiosyncratic details, even to fictional pieces is a style Yamanaka has mastered that I try to also make my own. And may I also note, as Yamanaka

does, that despite strands of non-fiction, my characters are “products of the author’s imagination” and “[n]ames and incidents are used fictitiously.”

Second, I am reflected in my thesis’s content. Two themes that surface in my writing are relationships and Hawai‘i. Yamanaka’s *Saturday Night* treats the subjects of relationships, family, and community candidly, painfully, and humorously. In my thesis, I also want to present another unapologetic, uncensored female voice. Yamanaka accesses raw emotions and utilizes a voice (pidgin or Hawaiian Creole English, the vernacular of her community) that is authentic to the people she is trying to represent in order to speak to issues that are relevant to her community. With my poems, like “Baby #1: Bathtub,” told in the voice of young woman who just had another miscarriage, I highlight the hard-to-deal-with emotions many face in the islands. Ho‘omanawanui reminds us how Mary Kawena Pukui notes that “an individual alone is unthinkable in the context of Hawaiian relationship” (7). With the variety of voices in my poetry collection, I attempt to create a community narrative of sorts that many will find familiar and relatable.

In addition, humor and laughter are instrumental to my livelihood, so I endeavor to infuse my writing with wit. For instance, my poems “Ode to Ka‘ahumanu” and “Love Story #1: Hāloa” and the concrete poem “Hawaiian Pizza” are intentionally dry and sarcastic. However, the use of humor is not frivolous. In her essay “Wondering and Laughing with Our Ancestors,” McDougall sheds light on a Hawaiian literary tradition of humor, mana wahine humor in particular, and how it “enable[s] strong social, political, economic, and cultural critiques that subvert colonialism, support ancestrally informed decolonial movements, and inspire people to act” (27). If not to just add to the pleasure of reading my collection, may the humor in my poems also “create new old visions that challenge colonial constructions of reality” (27-8) and place me in a lineage with

Kanaka Maoli poets such as Joe Balaz, Imaikalani Kalahale, Wayne Westlake, and even McDougall herself, who can make us laugh even in the midst of our tears.

## **Influences**

I previously described my literary mo‘okū‘auhau and gave a survey of my influences, but I need to spend a little more space to explain the sweeping influence two poets in particular, Lois-Ann Yamanaka and Haunani-Kay Trask, have had on my writing. First, the most prominent force in shaping me as a writer has been my close mentorship with aforementioned local writer, Lois-Ann Yamanaka. Yamanaka is a family friend who has known me since I was born. Despite growing up in Michigan, as early as eighth grade, on our annual trips to visit family on O‘ahu, I was able to study and write under her at Na‘au, a writing center owned by my uncle and her. When I moved out to the islands about seven years ago for college, I began to work for her as a writing tutor, and through osmosis, her style and advice was passed to me to pass on to our students. She also continued to give me feedback on my personal and academic writing. As I write, her voice is always in the back of my head: *write from your na‘au or never mind; good writing will elicit a physical reaction—tears, laughter, turning your the stomach, chicken skin—keep writing until one of those happens; forget adverbs, pick a stronger verb; and don’t give a shit about what any professor says about your creative writing.* And for that voice, I remain grateful. In my writing, I strive to be real, relatable, unapologetic, and exact in word choice, just like Aunty Lois.

In addition to her advice, Yamanaka’s writing has served as inspiration for me as a growing writer. Reading *Saturday at the Pahala Theatre* as a freshman in college blew open my perception of the possibilities of poetry. Specifically, her style of writing in voice is reflected in

my own work. She says, *It's a blessing and burden being able to write; some people can't, you know, and so we have to live with their voices in our heads too.* Truly, the people in my life are my grandest inspiration. When I sit down to write, I hear their voices and feel their energies; I let their voices come to life to tell their untold stories. At first, I was hesitant to experiment with voice, especially when it came to including pidgin. The book, *Writing the Other: A Practical Approach* by Nisi Shawl and Cynthia Ward, helped me overcome anxiety I had about “getting it wrong” as they say. And I do occasionally “get it wrong” in the sense that the pidgin in my collection is incomplete and inconsistent, but in my spoken and heard experience, that is what pidgin is often like. We code-switch and let the language flow as it will.

Another female writer I admire is the fierce Haunani-Kay Trask. Like her, I want to have the courage to be controversial and to speak out honestly against injustices that I see around me in a way that is, like Toni Morrison said about art at its finest, “unquestionably political and irrevocably beautiful at the same time.” In my Hawaiian Literature course with Professor ho‘omanawanui, we explored the “piko” of Kanaka Maoli literature, and how movement towards this piko defines this literature. In this piko are themes of genealogy, honoring of ancestors, aloha ‘āina, aloha lāhui, ‘ohana (both locally and our larger Pacific family of the past, present, and future), kuleana, makawalu, and pono. Hawaiian literature also uses the poetic devices of kaona and helu, among others, which ho‘omanawanui expounds on in her critical work *Voices of Fire: Reweaving the Literary Lei of Pele and Hi‘iaka*. Trask’s poetry collection *Light in the Crevice Never Seen* is a solid example of contemporary writing that is informed by the piko of Hawaiian literature. The first section, “Chant of Lamentation,” contains poems like “A People Lost” and “Blood on the Land,” that demonstrate Trask’s aloha for her ancestors and the lāhui Hawai‘i. In the last section of the collection, poems like “Waimānalo Morning” and “Ko‘olau”

move towards the piko by honoring the ‘āina and using kaona (layers of meaning). Like Trask, in the content of my writing, I want to strive towards the piko so that I can be more of a Hawaiian writer, as opposed to a writer who happens to be part Hawaiian. This movement towards the piko is demonstrated throughout my collection. In my poems “Grown in the Wai‘anae Sun,” “Direction,” and “Mo‘o ‘Āina” the ‘āina is prominent and alive in the movement of the written words in the concrete poetry to reflect aloha ‘āina values. And mo‘okū‘auhau plays a thematic roles in poems such as “Mo‘okū‘auhau: He Waiwai,” “Kūpuna Look On,” “Love Story #1: Hāloa,” and “Autobiography of an Island Boy.” I embrace makawalu with the many perspectives and experiences incorporated in the poems. Finally, I try to keep balance in my collection with poem order, varying more light-hearted poems with the heavier ones, and poems written in voice with more abstract ones. McDougall laments how the “wide visibility of [mainstream Hawaiian authors, authors without movement towards the piko] coupled with the relative invisibility of our counterhegemonic literature has engendered beliefs that our literature is not just ‘young’ or our people ‘unliterary,’ but also that there are no decolonial efforts nor challenges to the American occupation of Hawai‘i” (11). I hope that this creative thesis works against those misinformed beliefs and that as I follow in the footsteps of my predecessors, I will continue to forge roads for more Kanaka Maoli writers to do the same.

## **Research Methodology**

The research methods for my writing vary from piece to piece, but throughout I am inspired by indigenous methodology. In his book, *Research is Ceremony: Indigenous Research Methods*, Shawn Wilson explains research methodology as “the theory of how knowledge is gained, or in other words the science of finding things out” (34). Wilson seeks an alternative to

dominant approaches, by asserting that research can and should be relational, reciprocal, and respectful. I explore the qualitative Indigenous research paradigm Wilson delineates that involves looking beyond empirical knowledge, listening and hearing deeply, and understanding that knowledge does not belong to one person. He writes:

Research is ceremony... The purpose of any ceremony is to build stronger relationships or bridge the distance between our cosmos and us. The research that we do as Indigenous people is a ceremony that allows us a raised level of consciousness and insight into our world. Through going forward together with open minds and good hearts we have uncovered the nature of this ceremony. (137)

Wilson says that climax of a ceremony is what people tend to think of or see, like the sweat lodge, communion, or, for creative writers, the final product. In reality, much work and time was dedicated to building up the relationships and connections with “the cosmos” that culminated in the poetic ceremony. In other words, “O ke kahua mamua, mahope ke kūkulu,” *first the foundation, then the building* (Pukui 268). In the years I have been back in Hawai‘i, I have made careful effort to be intentionally *relational* by seeing the communal nature of knowledge, *reciprocal* by seeking to give back to my community through my work, and *respectful* of the knowledge and its sources in the ceremony of my research. I am now rewarded as “it all comes together and all those connections are made” in this Master’s thesis (Wilson 89-90).

As my writing builds relationships between people, it will also build connective paths for people to a higher level of consciousness. By approaching the research to my pieces as ceremony, I am able to create works of literature that reflect life “on a higher plane, more intense, more concentrated” as Mao Tse-tung asserts literature and art can and ought to be in his talks at the Yen-an Forum. However, instead of alienating my readers, by appealing to the communal

nature of knowledge and truth, my writing, I hope is, to complete Mao's assertion, "more typical, nearer the ideal, and therefore more universal than actual everyday life." To do this, I gathered information through interpersonal communications. I performed formal interviews as what Philip Gerard in his article "The Art of Creative Research" calls deliberate research. For example, I recorded a few interviews with my grandfather on my father's side before he passed away. He is such a rich character, and his fascinating stories are incorporated throughout my thesis. Furthermore, Wilson emphasizes how "talking story" is a legitimate form of research, and this idea is echoed in Gerard's notions of "deliberate research not directed towards a particular project" and "accidental research" (52). Over the years, I have documented as much as I can when a conversation or experience takes a turn for the interesting. I am inspired time and again by authors, family, friends, and strangers. I hope I have honored those relationships by producing work that will inspire more art and imagination.



HI(GH) LIFE

LOW TIDE

# THE BLOOD

## A SPOT

*Unending cycles of violence,  
dependence, and well-trained natives  
leading down the same colonial path  
the trees and signs have changed  
but the dusty trail remains constant.*

*Behold the very painting of your fear:  
the rising sea flooding  
to fill the voids  
where once culture belonged.*

*I tell an epic story of a time before,  
I shop local, I eat poi,  
yet here's a spot.*

*Out, damned spot! I say.  
But the words betray  
their purpose the moment  
they touch my colonial tongue,  
or even entered my mind raised  
on textbooks, Disney, and MTV.*

*Still, I'll keep scrubbing towards  
the day when the taint of colonization  
washes red, red, watercolor red down the drain.*

## MO‘OKŪ‘AUHAU: HE WAIWAI

“Since the 1920 and until today, one of the primary motivations for maintaining one’s genealogy has been to qualify for the entitlements and benefits derived from Federal and State government programs, intended to improve the lives of Hawaiians”

*How can you even be 65% Hawaiian?  
I never been good at math.  
Dats jus what they told me.  
I’d show you how, but my Auntie T,  
she wen lose all the stuffs.  
There was a huge scroll...*

“[C]ertain churches encourage knowing one’s kinship for both personal and religious reasons”

*You can go in four directions.  
You can go up,  
down, out,  
and diagonal.  
The goal is ten each way.*

“Both writers assert the use of genealogies to resolve conflict among family members”

*My cousins, they all say, we not Hawaiian enough.  
I tell them, no can be.  
I think they just give up, don’t wanna keep looking.  
Maybe find out how Hawaiian we are.*

“Others who have never ever considered the need to verify their blood quantum or parentage find the whole process to be a ‘paper chase’”

*A lot of kanaka, I think, no more help  
so they don’t know how.  
They give up.*

“As suggested by the 1896 writers of *Ka Makaainana*, Hawaiian genealogies also were “true history.”

*Start small.  
Start with you, the present.  
It matters how we connect today.*

“Genealogy was the refuge then in these islands... Not only were one’s origins of kinship held in esteem, but genealogies also defined the origins of the islands and life forms”

*This the Kumulipo.  
If you don't have it, get it.  
The goal is to eventually connect back.  
It's fun to connect to street names too.*

“The introduction of literacy and printing by the missionaries greatly changed the recording of traditions from oral recollections and memory to paper”

*You get one USB drive?  
Good. We need to back this up.  
You don't have to put it online,  
in fact, I don't suggest you do.  
But we gotta mālama.  
One pipe leak, one fire,  
even a small one...  
One copy is not enough.*

“In beginning one's genealogy, one of the most important task is to maintain some clear form of organization of genealogical information. How important this task is will become self-evidence once one has begun to gather and arrange even the smallest bits of information”

*And get plastic sheet protectors.  
Lots of them.*

“It may be necessary or desirable to meet with immediate family members or as a group to find out if any of them can provide the missing information”

*All this time I been talking to the wrong aunty!  
And Dad's full of it; he doesn't know what he's talking about.  
We gotta set up a time to eat lunch and talk story.  
Your treat, right?*

## AUTOBIOGRAPHY OF AN ISLAND BOY

He stands before us patiently waiting for silence.  
Then, in the air his concise and perfectly chosen words  
hang palpable and deep.

He says he has three pikos like the rest of us,  
but he's not like the rest of us.

The piko po'o, the soft spot at the crown of his head,  
bursts open into the indigo dust and introspection  
of our universe. He lives there with the gods,  
sharing secrets with his ancestors.  
Not of this world, he's made of an everlasting knowledge.  
All he says is crazy, yet nothing is untrue.

The piko that connects him to his parents is an empty  
pistachio shell for the father who spat  
seeds while fixing cars on the front lawn.  
For the father that should've taken his meth addiction  
and left the boy a typical Wai'anae west side story.

From the piko ma'i, the last channel,  
flows his child, his gift.  
A green ti leaf covers his ma'i,  
and the golden ukulele strings animate  
the melodies and tales he strums and hums.  
His enchanting voice draws us into the cosmos  
to join in the otherworldly conversation  
of the hidden poetry in us all.

He roots himself firmly in the mud of Mākaha,  
like ancient kalo, and the life of the land  
moves through him from mauka to makai.

## HIDDEN WAIKĪKĪ STARS

First dates are the worst, and this one looks like it's no exception. Tūtū was so happy she nearly died when I told her about Keahi. One of her three granddaughters stood a chance of one day having a bebe with at least as much Hawaiian blood as we do. I was excited too, until he brought me here to Waikīkī.

I think about blood as he and I sit on the lava rock wall, waiting for our buzzer to vibrate. My mind wanders as I watch mainlanders and Japanese tourists create two blobs around the menus posted outside of the restaurant door. To my right, a young women in a pastel romper and high heels balances herself with two handfuls of high-end shopping bags. She passes three local kids on bikes who don't look older than 13, wearing baggy pants, shirts with half-naked girls or rifles on them, and fitted, flat-billed baseball hats: New York Yankees, Superman, and "*Aloha*" in curvy letters. The punks scan the crowd looking for a loosely-held purse. A pack of military guys head off to enjoy their night out in the opposite direction. Their laughter howls down the corridor of the Royal Hawaiian Shopping Center. *A local boy finally asks me out, and he brings me here. A sick cosmic joke, and it's only laughable because Tūtū would totally approve of this quantifiably successful date.*

My gaze returns from the madness to Keahi. He was watching me. I smile, kind of, and his face softens and his pointy eyebrows relax. He already asked me about my week, twice, so he asks, "You come Waikīkī often?"

"Uh, not really," I answer. *Not if I can help it*, I almost say. "What about you?" I ask instead, and he starts to talk about how he used to come down to Waikīkī Beach with his mom's dad, his Uncle Jimmy, and sometimes his dad, and how they would swim in the small waves, or eat lunch and sing with the ukulele under the pavilions, or watch his cousins compete in the grommets. He and his cousins would pick yellow plumeria early in the morning when the dew still slept on the blooms, and they would help their grandma string long lei to hang on Duke Kahanamoku's outstretched arms for good luck.

He goes on, and I try to listen because his memories make it seem like Waikīkī was the backyard of his childhood home and his eyes actually twinkle with the reflection of the hidden Waikīkī stars. I try to listen, but I get distracted again. This time, by the street magician across Kalākaua Avenue telling his crowd to look carefully as he shows them there's nothing up his sleeves. I've seen the guy's act before; it's actually pretty good. I nod like I'm listening to Keahi, and I glance up to the sky. Man, it's all hazy and a little cloudy, nothing like his eyes, but then I see it. I see that one persistent star, the one you can always see, no matter where you are, even in the center of Waikīkī.

Suddenly, our buzzer comes to life, flashing red. As we both pop up, I think about blood again, his blood. Then, I think about the heart, his heart, pumping, giving that line life. Maybe this place, this blood, it's all what we make of it. So, I slip my hand into his, and we walk inside. Maybe first dates aren't so bad.

## LOVE STORY #1: HĀLOA

She used to go to church, you know.  
Sometimes she would come with me.  
Yeah, ever since you-know-what,  
she hasn't really been going.

Now she's really into, what's that called again?  
Oh yeah, *ku'i*.  
It was like all she was eating was that taro,  
or *kalo*, I guess. She was kind of getting skinny.

I don't know, I just have hard time  
eating that *poi*. I think it's an acquired taste.  
But really, it was all about *ku'i*.  
*Ku'i* this, *ku'i* that.

So I just try to support her, right?  
I think she still believes in her heart.  
She was talking about *Hāloa* too...  
did I say that correctly?

I guess I don't really know the whole story,  
but it's symbolic, right?  
Like, she doesn't actually believe  
she's descendant from a plant, does she?

And isn't there incest involved?  
And isn't it weird to eat your ancestor then?  
I get it, *aloha 'āina* and all, but...

But anyway, it was all *ku'i, ku'i, ku'i*.  
*Ku'i* this, *ku'i* that.  
Much to the detriment of other areas of her life,  
in my opinion.



## HAWAI'I, THE HOMELAND

I promise you, cuz,  
we get enough Hawaiian.

Like 51%,  
I did the research,  
and I know.

At first, I wen in there,  
and the aunties was all like,  
oh, you no more, you no more,  
like they the guards or something.

Funny,  
but once you do get in,  
those same aunties  
are real helpful.

But I'll tell you something,  
it's all bullshit.

If you get em,  
you still gotta buy  
the damn house.  
Cost almost as much as outside.

Then you sitting  
on your neighbor's lap  
for the rest of your life,  
him yelling at you  
to shad up already  
cuz you like sing in the shower.

And when it's all pau  
and if your kids never marry  
one Hawaiian, their kids  
maybe no can inherit the land.  
Because you no own the land.  
They still own the land.  
And I think, what's the point?  
Better off just buying your own land.

But, yeah, we still applied.  
And you should too, cuz.  
Because why the hell not.

BABY #1: BATHTUB

*I have to wear these adult diapers now  
because I was soaking through pads.*

*Yeah, did Koali 'i tell you I had another miscarriage?*

*No, don't be sorry for me.*

*But let me tell you, it was crazy.  
It happened when I was in the bath.  
The tub was full of blood.  
I was sitting in my own blood, or its blood.  
[red, red, watercolor red]  
It was nuts. I went to the doctors,  
and they said, yeah, I lost the baby.*

*I don't know how far along I was  
because my period's irregular,  
[is anything regular?]  
but I was feeling sick, so I went  
and the first test  
came back negative.  
But then they wen test again,  
and it was positive.  
I'm pretty sure not more  
than two months positive though.*

*[Her body,  
bony, lengthy, eaten,  
barely supporting her,  
could not support life.]*

*But man, it was a lot of blood.  
And I'm still bleeding.*

*It wen happened three days ago now.  
I don't know how long I'm gonna bleed.  
[we bleed every month.  
our souls, always.]*

*That would've been number four.  
It was right in the bathroom upstairs.  
No worry, I cleaned it.  
It's funny cuz this one  
actually was John's.*

*I'm going to rehab [again], you know, if we can  
get out shit together, we have a better chance.  
[of getting back babies? new babies? living past 40?]*

Three children snatched [saved] by CPS.  
How many more by Fate?  
How many more tossed out with the bathwater?

Three pictures hang centered on blank bedroom walls.  
Three walls with the chubby faces of three babies.  
One empty wall.

# THE ROMANTIC

## GROWN IN THE WAI‘ANAE SUN

I saw the new picture released.  
Now a man, as he was charged:  
5 o'clock shadow,  
handsome shaved head,  
filled out face,  
bit of fat on his chin.  
I recognized his ears,  
the unusual, pronounced crease  
undeniably his.

Crispy chestnut color, gone.  
New color, unnatural.  
Too ashy  
for this boy  
grown in the Wai‘anae sun.  
His face stained the color of prison.

The photograph mutes  
the fear in his despondent lips,  
but I choose not to ignore  
his unlit, onyx eyes.  
Eyes that were once  
alive when we laughed.

I will never know the man  
he would've been  
if he had learned  
to suppress his anger,  
and my laughter  
will inevitably,  
indifferently  
drag on without him.  
Soon, he will be  
just a picture  
on the news  
of a boy  
who made a mistake.  
And I won't even miss him.

I've moved on and But the Wai'anae sun will miss him long after his return, free to come home at last.

## LOVE STORY #2: MILITARY WIFE

After her husband killed himself  
with all of that insatiable crack,  
she didn't know what to tell  
her five-year-old son.

So she didn't.

But she did illegally rent a room  
from a military wife  
whose husband was deployed.

And clandestinely  
she did start sleeping  
with that military wife's  
"good friend."

And she decided to keep  
the beautiful baby that followed  
and name her after  
the old husband's mother  
who died of breast cancer.

And she did marry this new guy  
a week after they found out  
and became a military wife herself.  
And she did do it for the benefits.

But she did enjoy him for the redneck  
smart ass he was. And she moved  
with her five-year-old Hawaiian-Filipino son  
and stolen Rent-A-Center furniture to Texas.  
And the neighbors did, of course, think  
they were Mexicans.

Still, she didn't know what to say  
when he asked why they were there.

So she didn't.

## A FISH IN HANAUMA BAY

Someone must have put up a sign  
that said, please don't bother,  
please don't touch.

You may look, come close,  
maybe point and smile,  
but please don't touch.  
I am fragile and in danger.  
Do not disturb.

So they come in hordes,  
but not a single one has touched me.



## DEPLOYMENT

“Eh Samson, I think he may be the one. I feel corny as shit saying that, but man, there’s something about him that, I dunno, feels good,” I finally said. I was just coming out of the Pali Safeway when I got the call. I put my two bags in the passenger seat, and sat in the parking lot. Our calls had to be brief, so we skipped the small talk. The first thing he asks me about is him.

“Oh yeah, I’m sure there’s a lot about him that feels good, huh,” Samson said. The scratchy feedback of my own groan echoes back through the receiver.

“Not like that. We never even.”

“What? I not judging you, you know.” Samson prided himself on “not judging people.” Of course, he was judging people, but he did it in a way that he was equally accepting and discriminatory of everything. “He Mormon?”

“No. Or I don’t think so, at least. We just haven’t. Feels good wasn’t what I wanted to say. It’s more that he feels right, like in my na‘au.”

“Ho, you take one Hawaiian Studies class at LCC, and now things feel all pono in your na‘au. Right on, right on,” I heard sarcasm in his voice that others may have not recognized.

“They don’t even teach that kine stuff in Hawaiian Studies. Auntie Kimi’s the one who’s always saying that.”

“Nah, cuz, I just messing with you. I know what you’re sayin. I knew Lina was the one before I even wen kiss her. Remember though, you gotta give ‘em time to realize they love you back,” my cousin’s insightful honesty surprised me.

“Well, I don’t know about love...”

“No act. Just listen to your na‘au,” the laughing tone in Samson’s voice told me that our conversation had moved from the deep to the shallow end. I heard voices in the background on the other end of the line, barking an order. “Alright, Hawaiian, I’ll see you soon, kay?” He always ended our brief phone conversations with the same promise of reunion.

“Shoots,” I said, as always, before pressing the end button and saying a quick prayer.

### LOVE STORY #3: LOVE IN A TIME OF NEW RECIPES

You made ulu chips  
from the breadfruit tree  
outside your uncle's house.

My molars ground  
the too-chewy strips  
before swallowing and smiling.

I would have eaten ten-thousand more  
of your stale, fleshy bits,  
if you had only offered.

## HAUMĀNA

These students, oblivious to their luck,  
believe that America and the world  
cares about Hawaiians, their language  
(unfurled beyond “aloha”), their literature,  
their rights. They’re right  
to think people care about Hawai‘i,  
the land, the strategic location,  
the tourist destination.

For these students, the two are inextricable:  
Hawaiians and Hawai‘i,  
but how easily people divide, divide, divide.

When Hawaiian doesn’t equal land,  
and discipline is added to taking a stand,  
schizophrenic messages teach lessons too.

Soon, slaps on the wrists  
will show that even some  
Hawaiians  
don’t care  
about Hawaiians.

Formal reprimands follow  
for “disrespecting” a flag  
that has disrespected  
a lāhui since 1893  
and before.

At least their critical thinking  
wasn’t completely ignored.

## A MISSING PHOTOGRAPH

Today, I noticed that his photo  
wasn't up on the more hidden  
side of the icebox anymore.  
Someone must have peeled off  
all of the pictures and loose papers  
and handwritten thank you notes  
for a fresh new year. I wanted to ask,  
*Where is he?*

Is he on the left side of the closet,  
on the bottom shelf, in the photo box,  
accidentally mixed in and forgotten  
with all the smiling Christmas cards?  
*Where is he?*

The O'ahu Community Correctional Center,  
cramped in a cell of stained concrete,  
on a stiff bed, in a dull orange jumpsuit,  
smelling of sweat and testosterone.  
*Where is he?*

I wanted to ask, but I was too ashamed.  
Because no matter how casual  
I'd try to make my voice,  
I know they would know  
that I haven't forgotten you.  
They'd know that I want the photo  
and that I don't want to forget you.  
Even though I sometimes do.

#### LOVE STORY #4: FREE LOVE

Loving him costs me nearly  
everything I have. All my  
spare dollars for bus fare,  
all my spare head space,  
and all my spare food.  
Except for the bananas  
and the peanut butter—  
those he doesn't like.

I guess loving me  
isn't all that free either.  
His west side head aches  
from just looking at all  
the towering steel and glass  
and endless snakes of cars,  
white and red lights.

But, we sit in traffic upon traffic  
and ride on the C Country Express,  
bumping along the H-1.  
We oof in cars and tents, on beaches  
and the occasional bed. He listens  
to my poems, and I listen to his  
reggae music—the same choruses  
repeating over and over again—  
the songs of our love.

## LOVE STORY #5: CEMENT OF NĀNĀKULI

Out of the cement of Nānākuli,  
your radiant flower grows.  
Fed by food stamps, drug sales,  
and stories of Maui slowing the sun,  
you stretch proudly to Palehua.

I dedicate myself to learning  
each satin wrinkle  
in each unfurled petal.  
I carry no power of the citrine sun,  
or of Hina's kolohe son,  
but I will care for your chartreuse life.

Without my love,  
the cement will suck you dry.  
Your leaves I kiss delicately  
as do the Monarch to crown flower.

Every expended ounce of me  
for your life is worth the drain.

My tears, your drink.  
My joy, your fill.

In the cement, me  
and the stories  
are all you have;  
you still grow thorns.

With each prick  
my blood becomes yours.

Drop by drop,  
for your satin petals,  
I give my life.

## HIS FISH AND POI WAS ENOUGH

Everyone loves Kahalaopuna,  
beautiful and innocent.  
We cheer when Kauhi,  
violent and jealous, is condemned  
for the rest of his sad, tormented days  
to lay upon Wa‘ahila Ridge.  
He has no story.

The rainbows of Mānoa are a reminder  
of her spirit that lives on,  
but as I walk through the valley,  
light rain misting  
on my face, arms, and clothes,  
I feel the countless, untold  
stories of men dying  
in their rage.

If only the pueo guardian  
had not kept bringing her back to life,  
maybe then both could’ve had rest.  
Her, a martyr of beauty,  
him, no longer tormented  
by the desperate insecurity  
of his love.

Instead, she lives on in technicolor glory,  
he sits there, misunderstood.  
Her watercolored soul  
bends over, haunting him.

If only he too were born of laughter and lehua,  
and his mother and father the rain and wind.  
If only he was taught that women  
could be trusted and should be loved deeply.

If only parents had no say in their young love affair,  
and their poor decisions were all their own.  
If only he had believed, as she did,  
that his fish and poi was enough.

But he kills her over and over again.  
Each time her heart sings of love and regret  
and trusts him once more.

Her foolish faithfulness ruins her five times.  
She is lovely but not innocent,  
allowing herself to fall back  
into him for a final time,  
not even the 'Elepaio's warning can stop her.  
And finally, he devoured her.



## MĀNOA FALLS HIKE

Overgrown ferns and bushes,  
the verdant meadow feels it should go on forever.

Why would anyone ever think  
the islands should look anything but that?

The falling water jumps back up  
as it hit the pool's surface below,  
a gorgeous 150-foot trickle.

The cliff sits so high,  
does it originate from the heavens?  
Trees miraculously grow off the side of the cliff,  
somehow holding on by the roots.  
None of them struggle staying grounded.

"It says there's falling rocks,"  
I warn, staying on the trail.  
*No worries, Hawaiian,*  
my companion points to himself  
*Hawaiian,* he points to the rocks.  
*They won't hurt me,*  
as he glances up the rock face.  
*Besides, I would be happy to die here.*

He steps out from his place directly under the water flow  
but keeps his eyes closed as the drops  
from his water-spiked hair cascade into his eyes.  
He couldn't see me. He still can't see me.  
The sun spotlights through the overgrowth  
directly and only on him,  
with his head back like a little boy but with no smile on his face.  
His brown skin and the water droplets gliding down  
his face and neck absorb the light.

He radiates for days after our hike.  
I have never read a poem or seen a painting  
that captures beauty in the same way  
he captured the energy of the sun that day.

It was like falling for the lover of the land herself.  
A man worth loving passionately and recklessly,  
despite all of the trouble that he causes.  
A man whose charisma commands your affection,  
despite you knowing that the envy of the islands  
might destroy him and everything you love.

He stands thigh deep in the water,  
surf shorts nearly falling off,  
the lava rocks as a basalt background.  
The crevices, perpetually drenched  
in the sacred waialele,  
etch the story of our islands.  
The same wai tracing through the rock  
slides over the genealogy imprinted on his chest.  
Ink drawn not for him, for he will always remember.  
Ink drawn to remind the world  
that his ancestors are not dead  
and not forgotten.

His eyes are no longer closed.  
He looks up straight into the sun  
framed by onyx, pewter, and deep emerald.  
His imperceptible thoughts gave way to a smile.  
And I smile too, even though I know  
it won't be free.  
Why should the world be anything but this?

# THE UNAVOIDABLE

## HAWAIIAN PIZZA



## CALAMINE LOTION

*Calamine, Calamine, Calamine lotion*

An insuppressible itch that can't be satisfied,  
brought on by anxiety torments Grandpa.  
Scratch until he bleeds red blood  
all over his sheets that Grandma changes  
everyday. Paper thin skin tears  
like bark on a rainbow eucalyptus,  
revealing colorful layers under the surface.  
He pretends to just rub his arms.  
And I pretend not to scold him—  
I can't just let him scratch himself to death;  
with his low blood count, he just might.

*Oh no, no, no not the lotion*

Holding his hand help temporarily.  
Does he listen to the prayer I say?  
He relaxes and leans back, and I slather  
the watery, chalky pink all over his busted limbs.  
Pink and red dance and blend.  
When I'm done, he looks like a pasty haole,  
not the old Hawaiian he is. At least he's soothed.

*Itchy, itchy, scratchy, scratchy, think I have one on my backy.*

Absently I wash my hands, leaving pale pink  
nail beds. I return to see Grandpa's itch  
has traveled to his chest, already dusty red.  
He scratches until he bleeds, then more.

## AUNTY T

She's one of those people  
who did so many drugs for so long  
and then started praising the Lord.

She was high her whole life,  
so when she stopped,  
she was no one,  
no person of her own.

Now she's a child of God.  
Nothing more, nothing less.

Her hands are raised above her head  
and her dull, gray hair pulled neatly back.  
You won't hear any other word  
out of her mouth. Hallelujah.

Earnestly nodding,  
she listens, but she doesn't hear you,  
eyes wait until you're done. Oh, amen.  
Hallelujah, God is good.

The Holy Spirit is her new drug.  
And she's out in space with Jesus  
praying for all us sinners  
she left behind.

## ‘ŌPIO WANTED

A desperate Hawaiian deacon asks  
*what does our church offer*  
*to young people?*

Consistency?  
Beautiful hymns?  
Respect for traditions?

A desperate Hawaiian deacon suggests  
*traditional values and culture?*

Oh, yes.

Knowing Hawaiian  
helps to understand  
the scripture reading  
and songs.

A tired Hawaiian deacon asks  
*how can we reach young people?*  
*how can we keep the church from dying?*

Revive our double  
consciousness.

## ODE TO KA‘AHUMANU

Mahalo e ke ali‘i Ka‘ahumanu  
for your daring, I get to eat dinner  
with my kāne each night.

How can my lyric express  
the riveting joy of parlay  
regarding whose show  
we watched on Netflix  
while dining  
together?

Offerings of my sweat drops  
and grease spotted shirts  
from cooking these dinners  
seem insufficient.

And his complaints of over-cooked,  
under-cooked, did-I-huli-the-rice  
fast enough trace only faded echo  
of your rebellious legacy.

I imagine the savory taste of pig flesh  
lingering salty on your lips in bliss.

Did Liholiho let you eat  
and enjoy your meal?  
Did he need a refill or two?  
Or did he finish before you even sat down?  
Did he stand up and leave,  
you in mid-bite?

Of course, there was no shoyu  
for him to ask you to grab  
from the not-yet-existing icebox,  
so it must have been lovely,  
finally  
eating together.



## BABY #2: VISITATION

[Outside of her house}: Son calls him daddy and he calls you uncle. It's your own fault for not coming around. And my family keeps making fun Daughter when she says my daddy comin and bring me a pony. I told her that you're not.

[Over text message]: I'm moving to Colorado to live on the base. I need to get out of this house. I'm doing what's best for the kids. You're only hurting them. He can provide for them.

[On Instagram]: Thanks my soldier daddy for showing my kids what a man and father looks like. So proud of you.

[Through the grapevine]: They've only been dating for like three months. He cheated on her once (at least) already. And we think she's talking to another. But she making like they're all in love. Yeah, that house is toxic, but really, Colorado?

[Daughter]: Mommy, I want my mommy.

[Outside of her house]: Son's in the house, sleeping. Son's in Waikīkī with his uncle. Son's at the beach with my parents. Daughter is always home. No one loves Daughter as much as Son. That's why when we take her she cries for her mother.

[At a friend's house]: That girl is still attached to her parents' tits. She can't think or act for herself. She's so dependent and that's why she acts like that. She doesn't even know how to get a job. She just wants to be happy. But she's gotta think about the kids.

[Daughter]: Where daddy?

[At new girlfriend's house]: So what? Are you gonna go with her and them? I love you, but I'm not leaving Hawai'i. Put your kids first.

[Outside of her house]: Can you please tell your daughter to stop about the pony already?

[On Instagram]: I'll miss you so much my soldier daddy. Why is Colorado so far away? The kids miss you already. "Together forever, or miles apart only in distance never at heart."

[Daughter]: Where my daddy?

Daddy's here.

## THE DARK SIDE OF LIGHT

The wisps of clouds faded into the sunlight. They actually melted, because the heat of the sun kissed the colorless almost-nothingness too hard, too splendidly hard. Perhaps, the clouds were still there but got lost in the vibrancy of the beams. Perhaps, the clouds weren't lost at all but only hiding in the shadowless recess of the sky light.

I wanted to hide in his light, but he never let it show beyond him and me. In his truck, on the stretch of Kalaniana'ole Highway open to the sea heading out to Waimānalo with Rabbit Island in the touchable distance, always going five under the speed limit, windows down, warm ocean air rushing in across my face to his and back out, there his light nearly blinded me.

He would say that the Rabbit Island was *his* island.

"You're not even from this side of the island, you know," I tried to reason with him, fruitlessly. It was always fruitless.

*No matter. We get a connection, da rabbit and me.*

I told him about how my aunty used to have a pet rabbit, and when it died, her dad had it stuffed for her. She kept it on her dresser and even took it with her to college on the mainland. "Now that's a connection." He laughed and nodded.

*Well, lucky thing my rabbit is ageless and will never die,* he says looking past me proudly at the rock isle off the coast. Of course he was wrong, but I smiled at his innocent conviction.

"You ever been out there?"

*Of course not. I don't think it's even allowed. It's probably dangerous.*

"We should go."

*Girl, you're crazy.*

"I'm serious."

*I know.*

Sometimes, he would make *me* drive on our way out to Sherwoods so he could play ukulele. He never gave that as the reason though. Usually, a big fake yawn and *I'm a little tired, babe* was his cover up. I didn't mind because no other guy I had been with before ever let me drive his truck and I liked the feel of control on the fake leather steering wheel. I also didn't mind because that meant I got to hear him sing. He would feign tiredness, leaning back with his hands behind head, the soft hair of his underarms blowing slightly in the car wind just like twitching freshly stepped-on grass, listening to me go in and out of talking about my sister's new mainland boyfriend or how Toshi almost had to use the emergency eyewash in Chem lab, until we passed the stop light right after Sandy Beach.

As I made the wide turns around the bend by the golf course, invariably he would turn off the low playing radio, saying *Man, music these days*. "You got something better?" I'd challenge, knowing the answer. He would look curiously over into the crowded back seat of his 2000 Toyota Tacoma as if to see if there was anything of interest, lifting his sharp eyebrows up and lowering his soft mouth to the side. After a quick survey and a low hmmm, he'd reach back for

the instrument that always sat behind the driver's seat. Neither of us said anything, no introductions necessary. He tucked the worn hollow body under his right arm, his round muscles resting on its frame. The strings came to life as his fingers moved across the fret markers that still scintillated after years of use. He would just play for a little, getting warmed up I guess. Then he would sing.

His restless and imperfect song keeps me up at night. It's stuck in my head, and it plays louder than my own thoughts, on repeat. My heart tightens when his fingers move down the fretboard. I never heard his melancholy melody beyond that stretch of highway on the east side, except when I was alone, trying to sleep. At night, I hear his light, and it hides me from the darkness.



Some days, the light lost. Some days, an azure grayness enfolded the city of Honolulu, and noontime brought the same lonely feelings as the dusk. Some days, a thoughtless remark from his father entangled his mind so he could speak of nothing else, or nothing at all. Some days, my hand on his arm shattered his fragile peace and tensed his every muscle. I tried to move slowly, gently, but somehow I couldn't miss touching the scars, hidden like landmines, causing explosions.

Surrounded by the excited chatter of moviegoers still reeling from the final fight scene, he and I moved along towards the exit with the streaming wave of people through the lobby of the Dole Cannery theater. A guy with fresh popcorn in hand was maneuvering his way counter flow through the people traffic.

In a moment, he saw that I had locked eyes with the popcorn guy for the fleeting moment, not even long enough to catch what color his eyes were. Not that it mattered. His fingers tensed in the webbing of mine. We kept walking in step, and the guy's gaze focused forward as he passed by us.

*What the fuck was that?*

"Excuse me?"

*You were looking at that guy!*

"What are you talking about? Stop overreacting." Our hands hung stiff and awkward, intertwined between us.

*I'm not overreacting because you were checking him out.*

"I wasn't. I don't know him, and I don't care about him. Look, I'm here," I said bring up our hands to chest level. "I'm here holding *your* hand."

*Yeah, but how can you be with me if you're looking at every fucka who pass by?* he had begun to raise his voice, and I drop our hands and let his fall out of mine. I tried to sigh, but it came out as more of a tired scoff. He turned his head to look straight into my eyes. If looks could kill. His forehead wrinkled in wounded betrayal. Exhilaration mixed with my anger

knowing that I had evoked a passion in him that darkened his eyes and tightened the muscles in his neck.

*Who is that anyway?* he spat, turning around, craning his head to get another look at the man, already disappearing in the crowded lobby.

“I told you, I don’t know. It doesn’t matter. Come on,” I said. He laid hand on top of the other and pushes down to crack his knuckles. Then switches hands and sniffs loudly, scrunching up his nose and narrowing his eyes. “Damnit!”

*What? I just like see if he like one crack or two,* he said, and went off in the direction of his unsuspecting target. I hesitated for a moment, debating whether he would actually try to fight a mostly-innocent stranger in the middle of a movie theater. He stomped between a high school-aged couple walking shoulder to shoulder, and I decided to follow him.

“Please, stop. Just listen.” I reached forward and grasped his hand. His forward momentum halted. The force of my pulling alone wouldn’t have done much to stop him, so there must have been something else in my touch that took him out of the moment. “I’m here with you. I’m holding your hand.”

His eyes trace from my hand, to my wrist, up my arm, then into my eyes. His eyes are brown, but for the first time, I notice the blue encircling his burnt brown irises. Blue like the Waimānalo sky.

“I’m not going to leave you.” How can I see the sunlight sky in his eyes now?

*Why? You’re crazy.*

“I’m serious.”

*I know.*

## KŪPUNA LOOK ON

As unseen kūpuna look on,  
a young son of Hawai‘i  
rolls  
    rolls  
        rolls  
            his joint  
carefully on the pop-up table  
under the pop-up tent  
popped up on the front lawn.

Sitting on the cooler,  
he laughs  
    laughs  
        laughs  
            wide mouthed  
                remembering  
paintball with the family,  
that time mom stood up and yelled,  
“Who the fuck shot me?”  
and when Uncle Charles  
got drunk  
    as  
        a ducking  
            fuck  
at his dad’s funeral a few years back.

He’s laughing because he’s rolling  
his second joint of the night.  
Not a second thought to the dangers  
of these hazy allurements.

In 200 years, we have come so far.  
Has he lost the pride of being a kanaka,  
the most beautiful of races?  
The kupuna look on,  
do they see themselves?

They do not forget him as their own.  
They wrap themselves in his laughter  
and are kept warm.

### BABY #3: ROCK A BYE BABY

My boyfriend cries in my arms,  
like a baby, over his baby  
miscarried by his would have been  
baby momma who isn't me.

But I let him stay.

He cries over the unborn baby  
who will never be held in his arms  
unlike the not-baby momma  
who was held in his cheating arms.

His quivering tears wet my chest.  
Her chest was not heavy,  
with milk to feed the not-baby.  
A weight so heavy, on my shoulders,  
like the heavy breath heaving  
from my boyfriend's cheating chest.

But I let him stay.

Did the baby have arms, a chest?  
Will mine one day die in a bloody mess too?

If one day I only see red,  
red, red, watercolor red,  
my life force and little baby's death,  
will I remember my sigh of relief  
as I held my cheating boyfriend  
in my arms, like a baby.

## SACRIFICE

Burn all of the fuels  
red, yellow, and blue  
with full regard of the consequences  
until every barrel is empty and charred.

Burn all of the cars,  
the buildings,  
the men, women, and children.

Burn the houses and the schools  
until the sea levels rise,  
rise until they fall.

Burn ourselves to ashes in our greatest gift  
to the land, undoing our mistakes.

## SKIN

They can wear my skin.  
They can feel how deep  
the scars trace  
and the still open wounds.

They can try to run  
and feel the weight.

They will feel the prickle  
at the cool touch of ka moana  
or of mud between toes  
and be squeamish,  
or perhaps not want  
to take it off.

They *should* wear my skin  
and feel the burn  
of not being brown enough.

It would be only fair,  
since we can wear theirs  
every year. Tricks, tricks, tricks.  
Doctors, robbers, cops, clowns,  
pilots, super heroes—all theirs.

Borrow mine and keep it in a closet  
until it's time again  
for the ghosts to come out.

But maybe the family  
tapped with pa'u  
in my pores would revolt.  
And the ghosts will get lost  
in the patterns,  
a maze of meaning.



# THE FATAL

## DIRECTION

remember re-member remember re-member mauka mauka mauka mauka green mauka green mauka mau loa mauka mauka

do not rely on the freeway do not the freeway rely on rely not on the freeway do not rely

[illegible]

to tell you where to go they tell you where to go where do you go where do they tell you

A word cloud featuring the Hawaiian word "makai" in various orientations and weights. The words are arranged in a circular pattern, with some appearing in bold and others in a lighter font. The orientations range from horizontal to vertical and diagonal.

will outlast last the last road

## LUA: A KILLING ART

Lua: Two, Duality.

KŪ

You never throw the first strike  
cuz the second strike is always the kill strike.  
And you betta go for the kill. Dust 'em.  
Don't give opportunity for him to get up  
and call his guys. And you betta end it  
or bumbye his family's gonna come for you.

Me, I'm too old fo dance. Fo me,  
clang,

clank,

boom!

But I guess the fight isn't always gonna end up  
in your hale with your guns.

If you're being attacked, lua should be last resort.  
Use your street brawl smarts, get a gun,  
something. Cuz remember, if you're using lua,  
you're going for the kill. Always.  
You gotta snap his neck, pop his arm out of joint.  
No messing around.

He smokes in hand-rolled cigarette,  
moving to the side when the ashes  
fall on baby's fine, fine hair.

HINA

But people think lua is about killing,  
but it's also about healing, ho'oponopono,  
bone setting, knowing the body.  
We were our own warrior nurses.  
We gotta empower our families  
and our community.

They'll tell you how the missionaries came  
and banned hula. You don't hear about banning lua.  
But they did. They knew.  
They knew both was tied to martial arts  
and a way of life.  
You take that away, the mindset away,  
and you mess up our defenses to protect ourselves  
in today's fucked up world.

If we could just blow together  
as hard as we could,

They grab the land beneath their hands,  
but nothing seems to hold. The green  
  uproots,  
not made for the weight. It's all released,  
that is their fate, as empty hands  
  free  
  fall.

## LOVE STORY #6: HIGH BLOOD PRESSURE

His chest,  
    the nape of his neck,  
        rough fingertips,  
wherever I lay my head,  
    I feel his heartbeat;  
    mine out of sync,  
or maybe it's his.

My head directly over his heart  
chamber, pulsing under so much  
                                    pressure.

High parents.  
High sister.  
High, now dead, brother.  
High bills, high debt.

High blood pressure.

Hi, to the manapua man right down  
                            the street.  
\$2 for a "special"  
    with mustard mayo  
        over everything fried.

High tide,  
heart races when he sees  
the off-shore break, 3-4 feet  
    Hawaiian style.

Natural high  
    off the sea salt and sun-crisped breeze.

He came in early one day,  
complaining of a cramp in his calf.  
After laying flat on his back  
    sand getting literally everywhere  
    on his brown, brown body,  
he told me how he almost drown:

Got under  
    a wave  
            and fell  
behind it—stuck,

losing  
my breath,  
it felt like  
my heart  
would burst  
and feed  
the ulua  
this kūpau moon.

He could feel every vein  
in his body, the veins not enough  
to contain his life force,  
almost exploding  
with his will to live in that moment  
behind the wave.

He's scared  
to go back in  
leave his parents' house  
to go to the doctor's  
go back to school  
let me feel his heartbeat  
against my cheek,  
my chest,  
my fingertips.

I'm scared  
to feel his heartbeat  
that he won't make it past 40  
his veins won't survive his energy  
that his heart will collapse from the pressure  
of this unsustainable HI life

that his heart will remind me too much  
that we are alive and fragile,  
skin, bones, and beating hearts.

## WELCOME HOME

I prefer an empty apartment  
of greasy plate and pan,  
of trash untaken out,  
a left-on spinning fan,

a flushed toilet, with the seat left up,  
just to prove a point,  
and crumpled sheets left to greet  
what more could I ask him for;

of unswept tile floors  
and grimy unwalked places,  
of all of these stupid chores ignored,  
evident neglect my home faces;

his board wax left out on the table,  
basking in light of sun,  
while the TV talks to itself, mindless  
conversations of 113.99 dollar cable.

I hope he's not there to welcome  
when I get to my house  
lounging in his underwear;  
I swear to God, he doesn't fucking care  
an ounce of my care for him.

## MAUKA

He was up on top the mountain  
the day his brother died.

That day, he planted forty ulu trees  
chanting  
    chanting  
        chanting  
            chanting  
for  
    each  
        one.

All his family was at home  
drinking and crying,  
crying and drinking,  
but he stayed up mauka  
until the sun set perfectly over  
the glassy ka'ie'ie waho.



BENJAMIN JR.

Thanks, bro,  
for buying me  
all that wrestling stuff.

Sorry  
I never place at states.  
I should've pushed harder.

It's funny  
I only did wrestling  
cuz it was the only sport  
you was junk at.  
But I always tried to be like you.

You're the reason  
I made it  
through high school.  
Everyone, scared of you,  
left  
me  
alone.

Why'd you do that, bro?

Bro, I forgive you.  
For it all.  
Even that time  
you tried fo kill me.  
I know you never meant it.

I left the house. I left Nānākuli.  
I'm sorry, bro.

As much as I can, I go.  
Check on Dad and make sure  
he's not locked  
in the closet upside down.  
He's getting old.  
Still the same though.

Everyone is still the same, Ben.  
Nothing has changed.  
Not one of them has changed.  
Not even after they seen what happened to you.

Still smokin and yellin.  
Still worried about losing  
the Section 8.  
Still sellin.

They say we gotta get together more.  
Keep the 'ohana together.

They still just ignore me. Was it the same for you?  
That's probably why you did it, huh?  
See who would care? Come running?

They all cared.  
Too bad you beat me to it.

But bet you if I went to the hospital tonight,  
no one would come:  
*I no more ride.*  
*I get work tomorrow.*  
*I gotta watch the kids.*  
My same excuses.

'Ohana is bullshit.

I got a new wahine now.  
She lets me stay here  
with her and her mom.  
I hate town.  
She reads to me.  
Our mom never even read to us.  
I got her because of you,  
because of all the moves  
you taught me.  
I always tried to be like you.

I do miss you, bro.  
I swear I do.  
You was the po'o of our kauhale;  
we fell apart when you left,  
and they still tryin fo get their shit together.  
They still got that stand up cardboard poster  
of you from the funeral in the living room.  
They ain't got nothing together.

Couldn't you have used a weaker rope?  
Why'd you have to go and leave us alone?

# THE SACRED

## THE SIGNS

On the piss-stenched canal wall in Chinatown,  
he finally sits and sweeps away a cockroach.

Next to him, I clutch his house key  
and let it dig into my cold palms.

From a nearby hole, a fat, pregnant rat  
emerges to find choice rubbish for her nest.

When I hold out the lanyard, he refuses,  
*that's not my home.*  
But my every memory of that house is us.

*Did you any hō'ailona as you followed me here?*  
The rat? The crazy woman shouting at us a block back?  
The two dirty birds sleeping on the pillar right there?

*Don't be dumb. Those are just two birds.*  
*An invasive species too. But now it makes sense at least.*  
*How much Hawaiian are you anyway?*

Well, what signs did you see, Mr. Kanaka Aloha?  
*None.*  
*That's the problem.*  
*Nothing speaks to me here.*

I felt the coolness of his sigh,  
and finally saw what *I* had been missing:  
I took this beautiful, terrible boy away  
from his home to save him.

I took away the terrible bit by bit  
but lost the beauty somehow  
and found nothing left.

## MO‘O ‘ĀINA

We cycle with the land. Aloha ‘āina, mālama ‘āina, mo‘o ‘āina. Our sustained efforts to not just take; let the land itself renew. Cracked scars fall away as the ‘āina sheds its cement skin of hurt and violence. E ola hou.

## LOVE STORY #7: UNHINDERED SPIRIT

Do not draw limiting  
    lines on her rising, boundless body.  
You divide and confine;  
    your crisscrossing calculations  
propagating perpetual lies  
of our people  
    submerge  
    our stories  
    of the sea.  
*Smallness is a state of mind.*  
    *Oceania is a state of heart.*  
We are at the mercy  
of this ancient mother.  
    No longer cut off  
    she will claim her own prevailing place  
in our ever-enlarging world.

## OUT UNTIL HIGH TIDE

When I go to Sherwoods  
I can think of nothing but  
the Portuguese man-o-war warning sign  
that never comes down  
and the constant rip current alert  
of the orange, wind-worn flag  
flapping in the seaside gale.

I can see Ethan and Dad  
wrestling with the waves,  
letting the salt water seep  
to their bones. I hear our laughter  
glide over the picture-perfect  
Ko'olau mountains, as we eat homemade  
Spam musubi, and the leftover ocean  
drains and tickles our ears and noses.

Or I see the fear that jolts  
Jarissa and I out of the breaking shore  
to safety without grace or shame when we spot  
the dangerously delicate fuchsia body  
floating in a freckled, translucent cap riding  
the tides just a few feet away. We lose sight  
of it after ten minutes, but stay on the sand  
to watch the elusive sand crabs tirelessly  
peep out with each retreating surge.

I remember the sunlight in Kiha's smile  
as he jumps down on the lopsided sandcastle  
we had just built using some kid's forgotten pail.  
He says the princess deserves a fortress stronger  
than shifting grains. We sit by the rubble for hours,  
drifting in and out of conversation, and I count the sand grains  
caught in the webs of our intertwined fingers.

I can search for Ethan's shirt  
that ran away to sea with my slippers  
the day we put them too close to the shore  
and stayed out until high tide.  
And the hat that took flight  
with the wind when Jarissa fell asleep  
under the shade of the ironwood trees.  
And the promises Kiha made every time  
he brushed the sand off my eyelashes.

To breathe in the view of Mānana Island,  
to make out Molokaʻi on the clear horizon,  
to navigate the constellations  
of black and white sand grains stuck to our skin,  
to wade waist deep in the eternal kai,  
feet firmly rooted, but rocking with the water,  
as peace and contentment  
hit me memory after memory,  
    wave after wave.



## BATHED

*The kuahine ua catches me in the middle  
of my busy day, she pats my head  
and reminds me to not worry so much,  
she touches my brow and wakes my senses:  
She rises impossibly earthy  
from the warm pavement;  
her taste drips down mixes  
with my own salted sweat.  
I watch her affect everything  
she touches; she softens the world  
turning shades darker  
while her heart beats constant  
for me and the land.  
And finally, I feel her on the backs  
of my now clean hands.*

## Bibliography

- Atwood, Margaret. "Disneyland of the Soul." *The Writer and Human Rights*, edited by the Toronto Arts Group for Human Rights. Anchor Press, 1983.
- Brink, André. *Writing in a State of Siege: Essays on Politics and Literature*. New York: Summit Books, 1983.
- DiGregorio, Sarah. "Do Hawaiians Eat Hawaiian Pizza? Plus, a Little History." *Village Voice*, 27 May 2016.
- Dudoit, D. Māhealani. "Carving a Hawaiian Aesthetic." *‘Ōiwi: A Native Hawaiian Journal*, vol. 1, 1998, pp. 20-26.
- Dudoit, D. Māhealani, and ku‘ualoha ho‘omanawanui, eds. "Editors' Note: He Kūkākūkā ‘Ana, A Discussion." *‘Ōiwi: A Native Hawaiian Journal. He oia mau nō kākou (we go on)*, vol. 1, Kuleana ‘Ōiwi Press, 1998.
- Fanon, Frantz. *The Wretched of the Earth*. Translated by Constance Farrington, Grove Press, 1963.
- Gerard, Philip. "The Art of Creative Research." *The Writer's Chronicle*, vol. 39, 2006, 50-56.
- Hale‘ole, S.N. *Lā‘ieikawai*. Edited by Richard Hamasaki, Dennis Kawaharada, and Esther Mo‘okini, Honolulu: Kalamakū Press, 2006.
- "Interview with Solomon Enos." *Youtube*, uploaded by Madeleine Melin, 5 December 2013.
- Ho‘omanawanui, ku‘ualoha. "Mana Wahine, Education and Nation-building: Lessons from the Epic of Pele and Hi‘iaka for Kanaka Maoli Today." *Multicultural Perspectives*, vol. 12, no. 4, 2010, pp. 206-12.
- Ho‘omanawanui, ku‘ualoha. "Mo‘olelo as Social and Political Action: Responding to Jack Zipes (De-Disneyfying Disney) and Waziyatawin (From the Clay We Rise)." *Folktales and*

- Fairytales: Translation, Colonialism, and Cinema Symposium, University of Hawai‘i at Mānoa, Honolulu, HI.
- Ho‘omanawanui, ku‘ualoha. *Voices of Fire: Reweaving the Literary Lei of Pele and Hi‘iaka*. University of Minnesota Press. 2014.
- King, Thomas. *The Truth about Stories: A Native Narrative*. University of Minnesota Press, 2003.
- Linmark, R. Zamora. *Rolling the R’s*. Honolulu: Kaya Press, 1995.
- McDougall, Brandy Nālani. *Finding Meaning: Kaona and Contemporary Hawaiian Literature*. University of Arizona Press. 2016.
- McDougall, Brandy Nālani. “Wondering and Laughing with Our Ancestors: Mana Wahine and the Mo‘olelo of Hi‘iakaikapoliopole.” *Marvels & Tales*, vol. 30, no. 1, 2016, pp. 26-44.
- Maunakea, Summer Puanani. “Arriving at an ‘Āina Aloha Research Framework: What Is Our Kuleana as the Next Generation of ‘Ōiwi Scholars?” *Kanaka ‘Ōiwi Methodologies: Mo‘olelo and Metaphor*. University of Hawai‘i Press. 2015.
- "Pineapple Industry." Hawai‘i Digital Newspaper Project, n.d. Accessed 24 Jan. 2017.
- Pukui, Mary Kawena. *‘Ōlelo No‘eau: Hawaiian Proverbs & Poetical Sayings*. Bishop Museum Press. 1983.
- Said, Edward. *Culture & Imperialism*. New York City, NY: Random House, 1993.
- Sartre, Jean-Paul. *"What is literature?" and Other Essays*. Harvard U Press, 1988.
- Trask, Haunani-Kay. *Light in the Crevice Never Seen*. Calyx Books. 1994.
- Tse-Tung, Mao. *Mao Tse-Tung on Literature and Art*. Foreign Language Press.
- Vizenor, Gerald. “Aesthetics of Survivance.” *Survivance: Narratives of Native Presence*. University of Nebraska Press, 2008.

- Wendt, Albert. "Towards a New Oceania." *Mana*, vol. 1, no. 1, 1978, pp. 71-85.
- Wilbur, Matika. "About Matika Wilbur." *Project 562*. Accessed 12 Dec. 2013.
- Wilson, Shawn. *Research Is Ceremony: Indigenous Research Methods*. Black Point, N.S.: Fernwood Publishing, 2008.
- Yamanaka, Lois-Ann. *Saturday Night at the Pahala Theatre*. Bamboo Ridge Press. 1993.